

Real Estate Profile

Duxbury: a hometown by the sea

By Davis Bushnell
Special to the Globe

DUXBURY - Duxbury is marking the 350th anniversary of its incorporation with a minimum of hype. But then, the town has always accepted its history as a given, in an aristocratic, "let's-preserve-what-we-have" manner.

There are no sounds of industry and commerce here, although some newer residents wish there were so taxes would be lower. The shipbuilding and farming of yesteryear have given way to a quiet lifestyle especially favored by business executives and professionals who work around Boston.

Change and growth, which in other towns are frequently lionized, are more likely to be perceived bemusedly in Duxbury.

William Wadsworth, for example, can't quite believe the difference in size between his and his son's graduating classes at Duxbury High School. "There were 21 students in my 1952 class and about 278 in my son's 30 years later," said Wadsworth, a Boston banker who notes only if asked that his family has been in Duxbury "since day one."

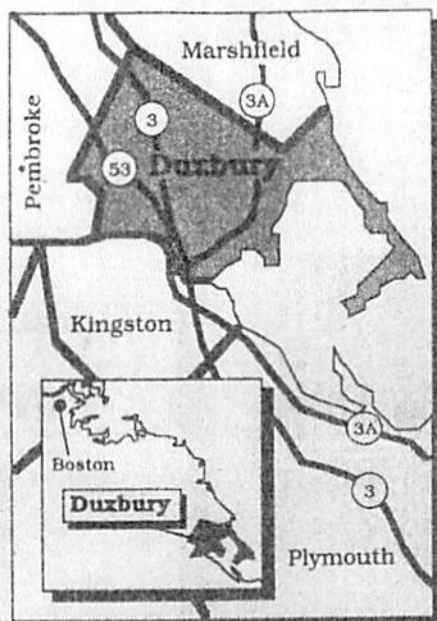
Day one came early. Duxbury was settled when Pilgrims including Myles Standish, William Brewster and John Alden moved across the bay to take advantage of a land division in Plymouth Colony and began farming.

Two other changes Wadsworth has seen are the conversion of most of the town's summer homes to year-round use and the "transient quality, to a degree, that is caused by executives who will relocate here for two or three years and then move on."

When Sarah Saccone moved to Duxbury as executive assistant to the board of selectmen last year, she had visions of "a nice town with a nice beach." What she discovered was a community that "didn't want industry so that the town could be kept in its natural state."

She also found something unheard of in her last job as business manager in another town. "People here were actually waiting to serve on town committees."

Duxbury is a town of committees, with new ones being formed as needs arise.



DUXBURY

Incorporated: 1637.

Distance from Boston: 30 miles.

Area: 24.3 square miles.

Population: 13,689.

Form of government: open town meeting.

Tax rate: \$18.70.

Services: Commonwealth Electric, Bay State Gas, town water, private septic systems.

Cable television: Campbell Communications Inc., serving half of town.

Public schools: two elementary, one middle, one senior high.

Recreational, cultural attractions: Bradford, Alden and King Caesar houses; the 1840 First Parish Church; Old Burying Ground (site of Standish and Alden graves); Myles Standish State Reservation; and nine-mile Duxbury Beach.

Saccone explained. She mentioned a seven-member, ad-hoc committee to the board of selectmen. Approved recently by town meeting, this committee will recommend policies concerning Boston Edison's Pilgrim I nuclear plant in Plymouth.

At that same meeting, voters approved the appointment of a town manager, an action that also must be approved at the state level.

"Voters have realized that the town is a \$13.5 million-a-year business, and that a full-time manager is needed to oversee growing budgets and services," said Saccone, who under her contract would become town manager.

The current \$3 million renovation of the Powder Point Bridge, the beach gateway that should be reopened in June, is one of the town's largest municipal projects. Other needed improvements, she said, include school building rehabilitation and road resurfacing.

A liability from a real estate perspective, one shared by many towns, is that, "Duxbury is beginning to run out of

buildable land," said James D. Sowdon, executive vice president of the Plymouth County Board of Realtors Inc.

"A lot of land has been set aside for conservation - land that will be there when you move in and when you move out," said Clarence Walker, a partner of Century 21/Walker Brothers Realtors.

Steep prices are also a limiting factor. The median selling price last year was \$219,450, a 29 percent increase over 1985, Sowdon said. Recent prices ranged from a \$135,000 ranch to a new, 11-room, \$795,000 property near the water, said Carol Nappellio, manager of DeWolfe New England/Chase Group Division. The lowest-priced new house was a six-room, \$265,000 cape.

New condominiums, as opposed to apartment conversions, have been built in Duxbury, Walker said. There are only a few available at any given time in three areas. They are priced between \$135,000 and \$335,000. Property listings are sporadic, added Nita Costello, owner of Duxbury Realty.



Globe staff photo/Thomas Landers
In a \$3 million project, Duxbury is rebuilding the Powder Point Bridge to the beach. Repairs should be completed by June.